

This, That, and Something Else

Whimsical thoughts that will resonate in your heart

By

Purnima L. Toolsidass

This, That, and Something Else

Introduction

This is a collection of assorted articles I wrote for an e- Newsletter edited by Deb Bhattacharya, who took up the task when Br. Brendan MacCarthaigh (a Christian Brother, educationalist and psychiatrist) returned to Ireland after helping innumerable people for some 60 years, mostly in Kolkata. Br. Mac's focus was value education and reducing stress faced by students, which often led to juvenile suicide. I was asked to contribute articles because of my concern for the cause and my lifetime devotion to animal welfare and spiritual psychology. I am convinced that at the bottom of all strife is a paucity of understanding and/or compassion. These lead to interpersonal tensions and psychological aberrations.

Very often we cannot change the circumstances by we can change our perspective, which helps us to cope with unpleasant situations. This booklet is a collection of some of the articles that came to me from an unseen inner power that I am old-fashioned enough to call 'God'! We can substitute 'God' for 'the Universe', if that appeals more to the reader. The style is light and simple and I feel both confident and diffident when I state that I believe everyone will find something they will enjoy and feel better for having read it.

We all hate the hate that seems to pervade the world. We also feel helpless to do anything about it. Well, I invite you to join me in my simple faith that each of us can do quite a lot to make our little world a bit happier, kinder and more amiable. If the experts are to be believed – and I confess I do believe them – there is a strong link between the microcosm and the macrocosm, so every action of every individual can contribute to a nicer or nastier world, whether we do things consciously or unconsciously.

This quote, read when I was a little girl, stays in my mind.

'A smile is quite a funny thing; it wrinkles up your face. And, when it's gone, you'll never find its secret hiding place! But far more wonderful it is, to see what a smile can do – you smile at one, he smiles at you, and so one smile makes two!"

Let's get together and spread smiles, because life is worth the while
when you can smile!

Happy reading and all the best!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

September, 2024

A discussion between Amit and Nina.

Nina watched as Amit ate absentmindedly. She had made his favourite curry but unlike other days, no smile lit up his face at the sight of his favourite dish. They had been married for ten years but there was no sign of an expansion of the family. The doctors had told them, 'it is in the hands of God. There is nothing more we can do.' Amit was the headmaster of a coeducational school in North Bengal. He loved his work and was passionate about inculcating values in the children who are the future of the nation and the world. Nina was an author. She wrote simple children's stories that had a moderate market. She was also an idealist, but as women generally are, more realistic than Amit! 'What happened at the meeting?' she asked when they relaxed after dinner.

Amit had called a Parents' Meeting that morning. Deeply troubled by what he read in the newspapers about the rape and murder of a trainee doctor in Kolkata, he felt that it was his duty to have a talk with parents and point out that it is in a child's formative years that the wrong tendencies are formed, and how parents can help to curb them by being vigilant.

'I told them what I felt. I gave them a copy each of the "ABC of Acrimony and Amity". Most parents listened with great interest, but as usual, there were a few who looked bored and impatient. The parents who were sensitive and genuinely concerned started to read the chart, but a few fathers just handed them to their wives and went off.

Can you believe it, Nina; one father came up to me and told, "Do you think we don't know how to bring up our children, Mr. Das? We are fully capable of teaching them how to be good human beings. Good bye!" He is the kind of father whose son is likely to become a bully and a masochist. His poor wife seems totally incapable of voicing her own opinion.'

'How very sad,' said Nina. 'But not unexpected. At least he was the only irascible man! Or were there more?'

‘No, there were others – both men and women – who looked a bit surly, but they did not say anything to me.’

‘What about the responsive parents?’ asked Nina. ‘They must have appreciated your effort.’

‘Yes, thank God for them! They were the majority, and most of them came up and told me how glad they were to get this opportunity to discuss values, since it was an issue they had been troubled with for some time. It is on them that I pin my hopes, that my effort was worthwhile.’

‘I’d like to see the chart you’ve made,’ said Nina.

‘Here it is.’

The A B C of AcrimonyAmity

A – anger	amiability
B – bullying	benevolence
C – cruelty	compassionate
D – dominating	dignified
E – egocentric	encouraging
F – frivolous	friendly
G – greedy	generous
H – haughty	humane
I – impertinent	inspiring
J – jealous	joyful
K – kinky	kind
L – lazy	loving
M – morose	merry
N – nasty	nice
O – obdurate	open-minded
P – pushy	polite
Q – quarrelsome	quick-witted
R – rude	refined
S – suspicious	serene
T – tempestuous	tolerant
U – unpleasant	understanding
V – vindictive	valorous
W – wasteful	warm-hearted

X – xenophobic

Y – yakking young-hearted

Z – zealot zealous

‘That’s very helpful, Amit. Parents ought to find this helpful in guiding their offspring. Having the traits pointed out should make them alert to the dangers of not curbing the first kind and the benefit of inculcating the second.’

‘Yes, Nina, that’s what I thought. I hope this does some good; one can but try. The way things are going, every little bit of right thinking is needed more desperately than we realize.’

‘Yes, that is true. We can but try. Amit, can’t you start judo classes for girls? Girls are so vulnerable. They’d have a better chance of protecting themselves if they know judo.’

‘Nina! I love you! That’s an excellent idea. I’ll discuss it with the staff tomorrow!’

Purnima L. Toolsidass

21st August, 2024.

Cow Cuddling

The Times Of India dated 13th July, 2019 gave an article titled 'Move over therapy dogs, cow cuddling is the new stress buster'. It is written by Elisa Mala who has a 33 acre bed and breakfast in the Finger Lakes region of New York.

Being a committed animal lover, this article naturally caught my eye. It mentions two cows, Bella and Bonnie who provide animal based therapy. This is compared to equine therapy with the difference that cows are more placid. Horses stand, but cows lie down, making it easier for a person to join a cow on the ground in a warm embrace.

This article reminded me of a book I'd read long ago – 'The Secret Life Of Plants'. Although I'd read about the landmark discovery by Dr. Jagdish Chandra Bose that plants have life and feelings, this book gave impressive data describing the experiments made by Peter Tompkin and Christopher Bird. It was quite stunning! After reading this book, I felt a new reverence for the plant kingdom and a better understanding of the Vedic principle that everything is permeated by the Supreme Spirit. The book describes how hugging a tree gives peace and energy. Swimming with dolphins has been another popular therapy. And pet therapy is something everyone knows about!

I was glad to read that the cuddling a cow is restricted to two a day, with a maximum of four participants at \$ 75 per couple per hour! Obviously, Suzanne Vullers, an accountant turned equine therapist, and her husband Rudi Vullers understand that the beings that absorb our stress get stressed by this activity. The advice they give to the people who come for therapy is, 'Respect them and their world and what they want to do and what they want to give you. The more relaxed you are, the better it will be for you and them. Horses and cows sense your emotions and respond in kind, most of the time.'

Reading this article made me reflect upon the irony of our getting peace from animals, used and neglected and abused and killed by us, humans! How very ironic! I feel this is something we need to get right in our mind. We take it for granted that we, humans, are superior to animals. I do not say that animals are superior to humans, but I do feel

very strongly that humans abdicate a part of this superiority by behaving in a way that is undeniably inferior in the way we misuse, abuse and ignore the suffering of the creatures on whose suffering we have progressed and prospered down the ages; whose wellbeing affects our own, and whose extinction will do considerable harm to us! This is the moral superiority. The mental superiority of animals is that they never overeat and they never eat anything that harms them; whereas we humans not only overeat, but we knowingly take food and even drugs that we know fully well will destroy us! And, since man is considered to be a thinking animal, it is more to our shame that we insult our intelligence by not using our God-given intelligence to avoid eating and doing any number of self-destructive activities and activities that destroy other humans, other beings and the planet we live on!

Then the thought came that if mankind becomes extinct, the other beings will probably flourish without us! It is a sobering thought!

The next thought that came was, why is it that we need pet therapy but they don't need human therapy (except man's best friend for whom his/her human is his/her God)?

In our mad rush for progress, pleasure and profit, we have lost touch with an essential need of a living being – the need to keep in touch with nature – our own essential nature as well as Nature as God made it. Animals are more at peace (unless tortured by humans or driven by starvation) because they have not acquired our greed for more and more! We need the stability of their inner peace, innocence, and warmth of love when we realize that we have lost our own inner stability in our frantic search for satisfaction.

Other beings are at peace because they are satisfied with the basics – food, shelter, sleep, and mating. They stop eating when they are full. They don't kill except for survival. They coexist with empathy and understanding. They practice no deceit. They bear no grudges. They are not blinded by ambition or jealousy. They harbor no complexes!

I think most people would agree that if we work at being more content with what we have, instead of succumbing to the unending urge for more and better, it would be a far less expensive and an easier way to

obtain therapy than the ones people seem to need more and more! And, an integral part of our own peace of mind and inner satisfaction is to be aware at all times that when we show some kindness to any being – human or non-human – we help our self the most! ‘Happiness is like jam – you can’t spread even a little without getting some on yourself!’ I’d read this long ago, and it stuck in my mind. And I can also state, by personal experience, how good it made me feel when I decided to give up anything that caused suffering to another being, as far as is possible and practical.

No one can live without causing pain to another – that is impossible. Even plants have life and feel pain. I got the answer to this dilemma when I read a story from the Mahabharata. There was a famine and people were dying of hunger. The Sage Vishwamitra was doing tapasya for the good of the world. He found only one low caste man who had a piece of dog meat, and told the man to give it to him. The man made all sorts of excuses, saying dog meat was not proper for a Rishi to eat, but the Sage insisted. Ultimately the man said, ‘But if I give you this meat, I will die of hunger.’

Vishwamitra said, ‘Better you die than I die, because your staying alive will not help the world as much as my staying alive will. If I die I will not be able to complete the tapasya I am doing for the good of the world. By eating this dog meat I will be able to complete my tapasya and all will benefit.’

So, I came to the conclusion that if I have to cause some pain, let it be minimal, and let the energy it gives me be used for doing what good I can, to atone for the pain I cause. Let my thoughts and actions be motivated by what will help this sad, suffering world – the people, animals and other species and Nature – and let me minimize the harm I do in my life. I have shared this story with many non-vegetarian foreigners who argue that even vegetarians cause pain by eating plants. It was good to say that they had nothing more to say after this! I hope you feel the same!

To conclude, I place for your consideration a conviction I have. The main cause of all strife is a lack of compassion and/or understanding. To my mind, this is the Satan that leads us to first be callous about

other creatures, then about Nature, then about other people, and then about those we love and ultimately about our own self! The terrible Blue Whale game is a frightening example of the consequences of allowing instant gratification to override common sense and sense of self-preservation, because it is undeniable that a good number of people continue to indulge in practices knowing full well that it will lead to diseases like cancer. Someone said, 'No one knows the exact age of the human race, but all agree that it is old enough to know better!'

Purnima L. Toolsidass

1. 7. '24

HOW NICE IT WOULD BE IF.....

1. We didn't get upset over little things.
2. We didn't feel resentful when people made suggestions.
3. We could resist the temptation to overeat/drink too much/smoke/stay awake watching movies..
4. We felt like finishing our chores before getting down to entertainment.
5. We had more sympathy for others' problems than our own.
6. We had the knack of being pleasant to all.
7. We didn't forget to chew with our mouth closed, talk softly in public, and had a witty joke ready to tide over awkward moments.
8. We didn't have the tendency to find fault with what others did and said.
9. Religious preachers spoke about the values common to all religion, instead of harping on the differences.
10. We felt happy at the good luck of others instead of feeling envious.
11. We had an innate urge to improve so no one would need to tell us so.
12. We thought a bit more about the suffering of others and a little less about our own.
13. We could find delight in the things that are free - like a sunrise, a pleasant breeze, a frolicking kitten, a smile from a passer-by, a pretty flower, green traffic lights and a beautiful tree, instead of feeling gloomy that we can't afford to go to Starbucks.
14. We could brush off irritation the way we brush off bread crumbs from our clothes.
15. We could feel compassion instead of aversion when we see a diseased dog or an old woman in rags.
16. We could not have the urge to laugh when someone makes a sarcastic comment about somebody.
17. We could forget and forgive past hurts and setbacks.
18. We could control anxiety and anger.

19. We could learn to laugh at ourselves instead of at others.
20. If we had the faith that there is something good in everyone, however bad they seem to be.

Purnima L. Toolsidass
June, 2023

How to make People Dislike You thoroughly!

1. Go on talking about yourself.
2. Speak in an autocratic manner.
3. Don't smile.
4. Never say 'Please' or 'Thank you'.
5. Be selfish.
6. Be patronizing.
7. Be irritable.
8. Be demanding.
9. Be non-cooperative.
10. Be unreasonable.
11. Interrupt people when they are talking.
12. Eat with your mouth open.
13. Find fault whenever you can.
14. Never be on time for an appointment and justify your delay.
15. Disagree rudely with what others say.
16. Make fun of people.
17. Phone people when you know they'll be busy.
18. Grab the best food for yourself when you are in company.
19. Rebuke people whenever you get a chance.
20. Show an exaggerated false sympathy when someone has lost a loved one.
21. Never offer to help anyone,
Never say a kind word,
Never pay a compliment,
Never do a kind deed,
Never be polite or considerate!

Then, you get crowned as the King/Queen of Unpopularity!!

Purnima L. Toolsidass
March 2021

Is The Human Race In Regression?

Long years back I'd read a little verse that has stuck in my memory. I think it will make you smile!

'When I carefully consider the curious habits of dogs

I am compelled to conclude that man is the superior animal.

When I carefully consider the curious habits of men,

I confess, my friend, I am puzzled!'

Being an animal lover – and dog-lover in particular – I treasured this to quote to people who are rabid dog-haters.

The couplet comes back to me when I 'carefully consider' the horrible events that seem to pervade the whole world, most of which are inhuman attacks on women and girls. It makes me wonder whether the human race is in danger of reverse evolution.

This thought was triggered by a YouTube talk by Shri Aurobindo's famous disciple, Shri Sraddhalu Ranade. He quoted a line from 'Savitri', written by Shri Aurobindo.

'He sleeps in the stone,

Awakens in the plant,

Feels in the animal and

Thinks in the human.'

The next step is an evolution to the Divine.

Swami Vivekananda wrote, 'Every human being is potentially divine, and it is our duty to awaken the divinity within us.' (I don't remember it verbatim, but this is the substance.)

Sraddhalu also quoted Shri Aurobindo's opinion that the body's life is physical, the mental life is this society and the divine life is spiritual perfection.

In which category would you place a man who kills three little girls because they are dancing? In which category the man who goes to a shopping mall and opens fire with his gun at random – or kills people enjoying themselves in a festival, or used religious frenzy as a weapon of destruction, or rapes and kills women and girls intoxicated by power and lust?

Certainly not in the category of decent people who have a conscience!

I am certainly no Professor of Theology, but general knowledge and common sense tell me that all the instituted religions – like Shakespeare's Portia – emphasise on the quality of mercy. I would go so far as to say that religion is not needed to tell a simple, honest human being that mercy is good and cruelty is bad.

There have always been criminals and perverts, but I cannot remember reading about so many crimes against women, so often and so brutal ever before. What frightens me is where it will take us? And in Bengal, especially! Bengal was once considered absolutely safe for women because of Devi worship. What happened to our culture, our inheritance, our reverence of intellectual and spiritual giants like Rabi Thakur, Raja Rammohan Roy (who was instrumental in stopping the practice of sati), Ramkrishnadev, Shri Aurobindo, and Subhas Chandra Bose, to name just a few.

The part that is most painful to see is how the straightforward matter of the rape and murder of a trainee lady doctor has been turned into a political issue. For heaven's sake – why can't politicians play their games without dragging an obvious crime into a controversy? Why can't all the political parties formulate systems to ensure safety for those who are vulnerable to brute force? The amount of money spent on rallies and countering them could have been used to tighten security measures in lonely and dark areas of hospitals and other places where women are compelled to risk their lives and honour.

Why can't every such place have a complaint/assistance room, manned by people of the opposition parties, who will fight against injustice perpetrated by the party in power? And, the cadre who man such booths will know that the ruling party will attack them if they misbehave! This will ensure the security of women. Surely this is not difficult to arrange in every town and city in India?

Here, I am sorry to say that in my heart of hearts I also blame mothers. I have seen so many mothers who have a blind spot for their son. I have seen them turn a blind eye to the son bullying his sister. It is not that only mothers are at fault; when husbands bully their wives and there is no retaliation even by grown-up children, it is literally teaching a young son to abuse womenfolk. Equally – perhaps worse, when

mothers-in-law don't stand up for the daughter-in-law when her husband bullies her!

I hope the women who spoil their sons realize that every mother who fails to inculcate respect for women in her son is contributing to turning her beloved son into a chauvinistic brute! I hope that at least new mothers take cognizance of this and refrain from making the same mistake.

A strong awareness drive about respect for all women – for gender equality – is needed urgently – why can't the respective Governments of every state take this up instead of hurling abuses and indulging in blame-games? Why can't all the U-Tube and TV announcers shout their heads off about this, instead of repeating endlessly who told which lie?

Unless these and other measures are taken up in earnest, I fear greatly for this world. When men revert to cave-man tactics it is a sign that civilization is being murdered, higher ideals are being murdered, mankind is regressing and spirituality is thrown to the dogs!

Every man guilty of brutality to a woman is giving a slap on the face of the mother who kept him in her womb and gave him birth. He betrays those who sacrificed and worked to bring him up, educate him and make him capable of earning a living. He insults the teachers who worked to give him education and competence to face the world. He throws down the drain the spiritual Teachers who gave their lives to tell us, poor humans, what the essence of religion is, and shames the very God he may have once believed in.

It is highly unlikely that insensitive brutes will bother about who they let down and who suffers in the process of their satisfying their perverted instincts. Nor does shame, imprisonment or death seem to arouse fear in them. Besides, shaming, imprisoning or hanging them does not help the society they harm. The idea may seem radical at first, but if you think rationally, it is eminently practical and just. If a law is passed in the Parliament that a murderer, rapist or perpetrator of other horrendous crimes have to donate an organ like an eye or a kidney, it will at least help someone in society! The recipients can be selected either by lottery or from a list of applicants. The thought of

living without a vital organ will put greater fear in the heart of men than any other punishment. Criminals harm society – is it not justice that they be made to help society?

More and more effective methods need to be worked out, to change the present deplorable situation. Including this subject in the school syllabus will be effective in the long run. To let the hue and cry die down without something effective being done is as good as turning a blind eye to all that is wrong in our world. We ignore it at our own peril.

The peril the human race faces is serious – don't take it lightly. Unless humane values are given the importance they deserve, the human race is truly in danger of regressing into a chasm of inhuman brute forces taking over all civilization.

Purnima L. Toolsidass
30th August, 2024

Mismatched Socks

I phoned a niece to congratulate her on her fortieth wedding anniversary. She was in high spirits. 'Auntie, guess what I gave my husband for our anniversary!' she said.

'What,' I asked.

'A poem!'

'I didn't know you wrote poetry,' I said with surprise.

'I don't, but something I read about mismatched socks getting mixed up in the washing machine triggered off some thoughts, and the poem came! Shall I read it out to you?'

'Of course!' I said.

She read out the poem. It was delightful and moving and thought-provoking. It was about two mismatched socks that went into the washing machine and came out all tangled up. She compared herself and her husband with the socks, because they were so different temperamentally and yet they were so caught up with each other, sharing a deep love and understanding after forty years of marriage with all its trials and tribulations, mix-ups, fun and tension.

Well, I think this little incident can help us all, without exception, even if we're not married. There is nobody on earth who hasn't grumbled about the people in his/her life on different occasions. It may be a colleague, a superior, an underling, a relative or family member; we all know what it's like, because no two people can think alike all the time, and each has their own problems and chips on the shoulder to bear.

Since the day my niece told me about mismatched socks being tangled up and yet warming the feet on cold nights, I have tried to think about that every time I felt irritated with someone in my life, and I have to say it's helped a lot! I also think about how irritating it must be for the other person that I am what I am, so different to what he/she is, and how they must, in their hearts, be grumbling about me as much – if not more – than I am about them, in my heart! Yet, life has brought us

together and life becomes much happier if we can laugh over the mismatch and laugh off the differences. Do you agree?

Purnima L. Toolsidass

9th March, 2024.

Logical abuse:

'The more you study, the more you know. The more you know the more you forget. The more you forget, the less you know. The Less you know the less you forget. The less you forget, the more you know. So why study?'

This is a fine example of using logic to confuse and avoid things that we don't want to do!

How many examples can you think of, for justifying not doing what should be done?

Remember 'The little girl in the 'Sound Of Music'? A lady guest of her father's – whom she did not like – asked her to sing. She said, 'I can't sing.' When asked why, she said, 'I've hurt my little finger.'

Mother to son, 'finish your homework before you go to bed.' Son, 'Oh, I'm very sleepy. I'll do it tomorrow.' Mother, 'well, I had planned to watch the latest Hindi thriller after your homework was over, if you weren't too sleepy.' Son, 'oh, if that is your plan, I'll finish my homework now, because I wanted to watch that movie.'

The same 'logic' is used for having an appetite for the things we like, but not being hungry for what we don't like; or for going visiting to a relative who bores us and going eagerly when it's to the house of a someone we enjoy going to!

Just as we all – bar none – have an involuntary tendency to avoid the things we don't like by using our intelligence to find valid-sounding reasons, we also have a built-in aptitude to justify doing things we know are harmful. The more innocent examples are overeating; the more dangerous examples are bullying and exploiting those who are weaker.

This crooked use of the intellect is not restricted to any group. Age, background, status, etc are all subject to it.

'It is natural,' you'll say.

Yes, it is natural. But so are many other things that we strive to overcome. It is natural for a dog, cat, crow etc to eat food if they can reach it, but we take care to see that they don't, even beating them for their 'natural instinct' when they do eat it. In the England of

Charles Dickens, a starving ten year old would face transportation if he stole an apple from a barrel of apples that was worth hardly a penny!

Financial wizards manipulate accounts and cheat billions; but when caught, they use their intelligence to find loopholes to avoid punishment. There is no area in today's world where people don't try to make something 'on the side', and this is considered being clever! Politicians use convincing rhetoric to win votes. Terrorists use rhetoric to justify killing innocent women and children. Mentally imbalanced people feel they're not wrong to barge into a mall and shoot at random, whoever may be around and get killed or maimed. Have you ever thought why people don't use their intelligence to understand the difference between right and wrong? Instead of giving arguments and making excuses, if they'd give some honest thought, how much happier the world would be, they would be, their families and associates would be!

At the root of everything that grows is a seed, as we all know. The seed of a grape will produce a plant that gives sweet fruit, and the seed of tamarind will give a fruit that is very sour. A Cactus will turn into a thorn-bush, and a magnolia tree will fill the air around it with fragrance.

These seeds become what they do because it is natural for them – they are programmed by nature. They are not blessed with an intellect that can use logic logically, to divert their natural gifts into things that are beneficial for themselves and for others, as we, human beings can.

Can you give some examples?

A gardener can graft two plants in such a way that a new, better plant is created. He can nurture the plant with substances that will enhance its development. He can put supporting sticks for the plant to cling to, to help it rise higher. And, everybody benefits without the plant being harmed.

Can you give some examples how a child can use his intelligence the way a gardener does, that will enhance his/her growth?

And don't forget, growth is of many kinds. Can you count how many kinds of growth you want for yourself? I will make a few guesses below, and you can tick the ones that appeal to you.

- Physical growth.
- Becoming stronger.
- Becoming more intelligent.
- Becoming more skillful in the hobbies or games you like.
- Becoming faster in finishing your homework.
- Being better at making friends.
- Improving your looks.
- Developing the ability to impress others and prove your point.
- Becoming popular among your peers.
- Being better able to understand the things your parents tell you to do/not do.
- Being better able to control your temper.
- Being able to not feel hungry all the time.
- Being able to pass off as a joke something silly you say or do.
- Being able to find a witty comment when in company.
- Being more confident when facing an interview.

You will be able to think of lots more, I'm sure.

Having read this, what does your intelligence tell you to do? Find illogical logic or dare to be honest? You know the consequences of each and you have the freedom to make your choices.

However, whichever you choose, you are the one who will be responsible for the consequences. It may be today, tomorrow, a year later, or when you grow old.

Watching the life, behavior, and choices of others is an eye-opener, but even those who can see, often choose not to see. Are you one of those? I hope not, because that never leads to happiness, and we all want to be happy!

Now, tell me, who is the good gardener in the life of a human being? It can be a parent, a teacher, a wife or husband, a role model, a political leader like Mahatma Gandhi, or a philosopher like Swami

Vivekananda. Or, it can be your own intelligence – but honest intelligence, not one who abuses logic!
So, think over it and let me know whether I'm right or wrong, because I certainly don't want to bluff myself with logical abuse of my intelligence!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

2nd Nov. '23

MOTHERS' DAY

It was Mothers' Day, so my friend and I - both in our early eighties, planned to treat ourselves to coffee at Starbucks. Children grown up, some out of town and some very busy with their own lives. My friend and I had vowed, when our children were born, that we would never become possessive mothers, and would never expect them to give us company in our old age. This became a blessing when we heard other mothers say how lonely they were because their children had no time for them.

We had barely settled at the tiny table, when a couple of very lovely teenager girls came and took the next table. They gave their order and then settled to chat.

'So, then, Anjali, what's happening?' said the girl in blue.

'Oh! It's such a bore,' said Anjali. 'It's Mother's day on Sunday, and I did so want to go to a movie with Bobo! Now I'll have to go to 'Burma-Burma' because Mummy wants a family lunch. Being Mother's day, if I try to put it off, she'll go on and on saying how she feels neglected by us! Why can't she understand that we want to do other things, not spend Sunday with her?'

'Well, she has become very lonely after your father passed away,' said the girl in blue.

'Rita!' exclaimed Anjali. 'People have to die, you know! It's not fair that I should be expected to give company to my Mom because Dad died!'

'Well, I don't know. I love to chat with my mother. We're like friends. I can tell her anything. She's quite happy to sit with Ravi and me, or go to a movie with us, and Ravi enjoys her company too.'

'You're lucky, Rita. I wish my mother was like yours. Ever since I can remember, I've felt irritated by my Mom. She never had time to chat or have fun with us. Either she was busy with the house, or chatting on the phone, or going off to kitty parties. Dad was busy making money. My brother and I felt like the 'poor rich children'. They didn't have time for us when we wanted to spend time with them, and now we don't want to spend time with them. Kamal feels the same as I do.'

‘Yes, that is sad,’ said Rita. ‘I wonder why most parents don’t give more time and become friends with their children?’

‘Don’t know, Rita. Do you remember our teacher Mrs. Ayesha Das at the Teacher’s Centre? I often heard her say that whereas teachers are taught how to teach, parents are never taught how to parent! I understand better now, what she meant! Maybe Mr. Modi should make a law that a married couple have to take some classes on parenting as soon as the lady becomes pregnant, or else they have to pay double for the delivery charges!’

‘That’s a good one! Poor Mr. Modi - what does he know about parenting? He has no children!’

‘So what? There are so many aunts and uncles who have never married, but are so understanding! My friend, Sudha, has an uncle who is a widower, without children, but she says she can discuss any problem with him better than with her own Dad.’

‘OK, agreed, but then there are aunts who are really obnoxious! Julie’s aunt never married. She lives with them and interferes in everything. Julie’s Mom gets quite fed up of her, but her Dad says that they must be tolerant because she is a very unhappy woman.’

‘Why is she unhappy?’

‘Oh! They say she is unhappy because she never got married!’

‘What rubbish! Haven’t you seen how so many married couples fight all the time? In fact, it makes me wonder whether I should get married or not. Bobo is such a darling, but I feel scared he may change.’

‘Well, yes,’ said Rita thoughtfully. ‘That risk is always there. But then, we may change, too. Meeting frequently and living together are quite different, aren’t they? WE also may change - or our husband may think we’ve changed, because when we live together we can’t always be sweet, smiling, and understanding! Men forget that their wives have their own opinions and preferences, and then quarrels begin!’

‘Well, Rita, I have decided to tell Bobo that if he expects me to cater to his preference all the time, I’m not interested.’

‘Suppose he breaks off, Anjali? What will you do?’

‘I don’t know, Rita. I’ve thought and thought about this. I love Bobo very much. It will break my heart if he cuts off with me. But I feel that

it's better to tell him now rather than have quarrels later and a heart-breaking divorce later.'

'Hmm..... can't disagree with that.'

'Ah! That's our call. Let me get our coffees and then we'll decide about marriage and Mothers' Day!'

My friend and I smiled at each other. We'd been listening to the girls' ideas about Mothers' Day. We sipped our coffee, shared some reminiscences about how there was no Mothers' Day when we were young, and reflected about the complications in relationships - whether mother and child, husband and wife, siblings or friends.

As we got up to leave, my friend said, 'well, Pallavi, I suppose the only way is to remember life is like a train journey. Everyone we meet is a co-passenger for a while and then we're left by ourselves. The only way to be happy is to have no expectations of anybody and to be as self-reliant as possible. If we don't do this, we'll only face disappointment and sadness.'

'I guess, you're right,' I said. 'It sounds so simple and is so hard to put into practice, isn't it? Oh, well! That's life!'

Purnima L. Toolsidass

April, 2024

Operation Beluga.

A friend sent me a YouTube clip about 'Operation Beluga' that was carried out in 1984, to save 3,000 Beluga whales who were trapped in an ice-hole in the Chu Chi Sea in North Russia. The Soviet Union sent their ice-breaker ship 'Admiral Mackroff' to rescue them. The ship cut through a passage in the ice, but the whales refused to follow it out to safety.

The crew was inspired to play Tchaikovsky on the Public Announcement system, and the whales began to follow the ship. After a journey of a hundred miles, 2,000 Beluga whales reached the open seas in safety.

I was moved to see this clip. The power of music is incredible! Some thirty years ago I'd read a book called 'The Secret Life of Plants' written by two biologists whose names I have forgotten – I daresay you can find out from Google if you want to read it. It described how a senior officer of the New York Police Department was training policemen in the use of a lie detection machine – a new invention at that time. Tired after a long day, but too mentally tense to sleep, the officer made a cup of coffee and he sat on his chair to relax. His eyes fell on the machine and the dressena plant beside it. On a sudden impulse he connected the wires of the lie detector machine to the plant. To his great surprise, the needle started moving. Idly, he wondered what would happen if he dipped a leaf of the plant into his scalding hot coffee. The needle showed violent agitation.

The officer decided not to dip the leaf into the coffee, but pretend he would do so. The needle remained unmoving even when he took the cup of coffee close to a leaf. That made him wonder if it was possible that plants could read human minds and if this faculty could be used as a preventive for acts of terrorism.

That started a trend of experiments to do further research on Jagdish Chandra Bose's spectacular discovery in 1901, that plants had life and responded to human stimuli.

The thought that came to me is that when even plants and other species respond to music, why can't music be used to bring peace and inclinations for peace in human beings?

The increasing violence the world over makes it imperative to explore every possible means to reduce the anger and hatred that seems to be overcoming the human race.

The connection between the microcosm and macrocosm is not new, but very few people realize its importance. The home is the first unit of a society and it is from the home that we need to spread understanding and peace. And, compassion is essential for both.

If every family were to make it a priority to be polite and considerate, to not grumble or snap at each other, to be appreciative and encouraging, not only will the family become far happier, but each individual will spread positive vibes wherever he or she goes.

It is no use talking about what the political leaders should do – they are not interested in your opinion or mine! While we cannot change the world in general, we can certainly change our own little world. Knowing this, it seems silly to not make this small effort for creating a happy atmosphere at home and workplace.

It sounds almost too easy to succeed! Start the day with a smile and cheerful 'good morning!' Offer to make tea – or coffee – instead of ordering Mummy to do so. Extending loving help will make you feel much better than lounging around. Husbands, especially, tend to take their wives for granted. They will be astonished at how happy the home becomes when they offer a little praise or sympathy for the daily tasks their wives do, even when they're not feeling well. Grumpiness is infectious; so is cheerfulness – and who wants to have a grumpy family, anyway?

'A smile is quite a funny thing; it wrinkles up your face. And when it's gone you can never find its secret hiding place.

But far more wonderful it is, to see what a smile can do. You smile at one; he smiles at you, and so, one smile makes two!'

Here's another –

‘Smile a smile, for when you smile, another smiles, and soon you have miles and miles of smiles. And life is worthwhile, because you can smile!’

And last, but not least, smile because you look better that way!

Smiles are infectious – let’s start an epidemic! Who can tell how far it’ll spread?!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

12th August, 2024

Thinking Out of the Box.

I was quite puzzled when I first heard this phrase. Then my whimsical brain said, 'it must refer to the TV!' You see, I believe that the TV deters independent thinking. Habitual watchers seems to talk about only what they've seen or heard on the TV – now, the U Tube news channels, too – many of which are biased or inclined to dramatize and mislead.

Then I felt that it means 'to be innovative'. Again I felt a bit puzzled. Why should we need to be told to be innovative? Surely everybody is innovative in some way or another? After all, mankind has progressed on this God-given faculty, whereas the other species still live as programmed by nature. Had mankind not had this ability we'd still be living like people in the stone-age!

On reflection, however, it seems that in some ways, people do become stagnant. All too often I see people who fear to take any risk, in case it may not be a success. I remember an incident during the days I was active in animal welfare work. We had proposed a method for curtailing the ghastly smuggling of turtles. To cajole the officer in charge I said, 'you'll be a pioneer if you do this.' He replied, 'madam, I don't mind if I'm not a pioneer, but I don't want to be a martyr!'

The same attitude is seen at schools. When I asked if I could give a talk and show some animal welfare related videos during the monsoon (because outdoor sports are not possible and no exams are on), I usually faced doubtful and disinterested faces. It was uphill work to explain how much this would benefit the students in so many ways. Mostly, I was interrupted half way, with, 'well, thank you very much for your offer, Mrs. Toolsidass; we'll get back to you.' And, there is no need to explain what that means!

I felt a deep sorrow. Here are students facing all kinds of psychological problems, and those who are supposed to be experts in child psychology show no interest in an offer for an activity that would benefit their students without them having to pay anything!

We learn the hard way! Expert Counseling comes at Rs.1,000 or more per session at the Counseling Centers, not to mention the emotional

suffering of the family, and harm to child or his studies. And here was something that could be tried for free and was obviously likely to help – and they were not interested! Was it apathy, ignorance, indifference, or the habit of wearing blinkers to avoid any extra effort – meaning is it laziness or just not caring what happens as long as we get our monthly remuneration?

The whole world seems to be divided into three basic groups – those who want to use their intelligence and skills to improve, those who want to avoid change of any kind, and those who don't think about anything but their immediate pleasures.

The first group is the most admirable, all progress or improvement is due to them. The second group is what is meant by bigotry, and the third hardly deserve to be called sentient beings!

I write harshly, not out of any dearth of goodwill, but out of a strong desire to shake up the reader and prod him/her to give some thought – 'am I using my abilities to help my students/colleagues/family/country or am I a parasite on society?' 'Am I lazy and selfish in my attitude or am I socially responsible and proactive?' 'Am I in full awareness of my responsibilities to the world from whom I get so much, or am I an ungrateful swindler who knows only how to take but not to give?'

After all, most of us are basically good at heart and benevolent by nature. Our problem is that we feel helpless to do anything effective against the odds of all that is negative. It is quite true that we can't all be heroes and make dramatic improvements, but it is equally true that each of us has tremendous potential to contribute in our own little way to bring in little changes that will help people of all ages in different ways. And, every little improvement is a big step in the right direction! We all have hidden abilities and talents, but they need to be awoken by a determination to focus our God-given brain on how we can help whoever we can, whoever we deal with, without bothering about negative repercussions or lack of reward or renown.

And, not forget the connection between the microcosms to the macrocosm. Even if we fail, we will inspire others to try, which is no small achievement!

I have to give full credit to the people who did dare to allow me to do my little bit. Had they not dared to take this initiative, what would all my initiative been worth? We are all interlinked – mankind, other species and Nature. We stand in danger of annihilation at worst and frustration at best, if we forget this. Most of us believe in the Almighty and would surely want to be able to tell our Maker when we meet Him, 'God, I tried.'

Purnima L. Toolsidass

18. 8. 2023.

THREE DOZEN DEFINATIONS.

1. Monster: a person who has no compassion.
2. Miser: a person who hates to share anything.
3. Beggar: a person who's always asking for things.
4. Millionaire: a person who delights in giving.
5. Tyrant: a person who insists his way is the best way.
6. Fool: a person who doesn't learn from his mistakes.
7. An animal: a person who can't control his lust.
8. Businessman: a person who gives only if he can get something in return.
9. An intellectual: a person who has an open mind.
10. Coward: a person who doesn't dare to admit he's wrong.
11. Corrupt: a person who only does what is expedient.
12. Prisoner: a person trapped in the local, colloquial and equivocal.
13. Emperor: a person who can control his lower desires, anger, greed and fear.
14. Clown: a person who insists on speaking when he has nothing relevant to say.
15. Coward: a person who is too timid to speak against what is wrong.
16. Artist: a person who has the skill to turn unpleasantness to pleasantness.
17. Saint: a person who never bears a grudge; never knowingly hurts anyone.
18. Destitute: a person who is not loved for himself; only for what he has.
19. A pathetic object: a person who needs to buy popularity.
20. An invalid: a person who needs help but can't help anyone.
21. A cripple: a person with no self-confidence, no optimism, and no wish to improve.
22. A blind man: a person who can't see the faults in people he likes or the virtues in those he dislikes.
23. A Devil: one who makes bad things seem attractive.

24. A friend: a person who will even quarrel with you to stop you from harming yourself.
25. A corpse: a person without a conscience.
26. A warrior: a person whose faith in human values remains unimpaired.
27. An idiot: a person who believes everything people tell him.
28. A champion: a person who supports what is right and just.
29. An individual: a person who sets his own parameters and is not influenced by what 'they' say.
30. A gentleman: a person who holds on to good manners no matter how badly others behave.
31. A Bankrupt: a person who is too poor in spirit to give praise even when it is fully deserved.
32. A juggler: a person who tries to keep his mother, wife, boss, children and neighbors happy all the time.
33. An acrobat: a person who knows the wickedness of the world but refuses to give up idealism.
34. A beautician: a person who sees the hidden potential and brings out the beauty.
35. A chef: a person who takes up whatever ingredients are available and turns them into a delicious, nutritious dish.
36. A poet: a person who helps us see beauty where we never imagined it could exist.

Purnima L. Toolsidass

12. 5. '22

You Are Fortunate If.....

I woke up with the thought, 'today is Independence Day!' The day was dull and my bed was comfortable. The thought of getting up was not appealing. 'Today is a holiday; I need not get up now', I thought. I lingered in a half-awake state, with the thought of 'Independence Day.'

'You are fortunate that you are born in an Independent India.' The voice was clear. No it was not coming from outside. It was the voice of my heart in my semi-asleep state. It went on. 'You are fortunate that you are healthy and can enjoy life.'

'You are fortunate that you are moderately well-off.....so many suffer from grinding poverty.'

'You are fortunate to have a family who loves you, and who you love.'

'You are fortunate that you have faith in goodness and want to help others.'

'You are fortunate to have had a good education.'

'You are fortunate that you love books, so you don't depend on others for company.'

'You are fortunate that you have some friends who are genuine, not self-seekers.'

'You are fortunate that you're not fussy about food and enjoy all kinds of cuisine without having digestion problems or allergies!'

'You are fortunate that you love dogs and don't fear to go to a home where they have pets.'

'You are fortunate that you have faith in a benevolent higher Power, because you have Him to turn to when you're afraid or distressed.'

'You are fortunate to have a sense of humour and can laugh at yourself and see the funny side of the situation.'

'You are fortunate that you don't get nausea when you travel.'

'You are fortunate to have a sympathetic nature, because people need a good listener.'

'You are fortunate that you're not a good cook because nobody asks you to cook their favourite dish for them.'

'You are fortunate that you are not ugly and you are fortunate that you are not very beautiful because people feel more comfortable with someone who is plain and simple.'

'You are fortunate that your philosophy and your nature are not the kind that makes you obstinate and prejudiced.'

'You are fortunate that you are not ambitious, because this way you feel satisfied and happy with what you have, instead of having insatiable cravings and feelings of inferiority.'

'You are fortunate that you love music, because this is a sure-shot method for soothing negative feelings that arise in all beings.'

'You are fortunate that you are not very clever, because clever people invite antagonism and envy.'

‘You are fortunate to be involved in social work, because everybody needs some activity that enhances self-esteem.’

The words banished my sleep. ‘Yes, I am fortunate!’ I thought. ‘But my good fortune won’t bring me lasting happiness unless I use my good fortune for the good of my beloved country and people.’ I got up, filled with a new energy, wondering how best I can do this!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

16th August, 2024